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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000075

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2010

TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG IS GOI EXTERNAL

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN CONSUL SAYS JORDAN WANTS PRISONERS IN EXCHANGE FOR RETURNING AMBASSADOR TO TEL AVIV

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Jordanian Consul Mohammed Abu-Wandi told political counselor January 5 that ongoing discussions with FM Shalom over both Shalom's desire to visit Amman and the return of a Jordanian ambassador to Tel Aviv focus on Israel's release of some 13 Jordanian "security" prisoners. Abu-Wandi said his mission has been discussing the issue at several levels with the Israeli government and with other unspecified "friends" in the hope of convincing the GOI that the prisoner issue is of paramount importance.

12. (C) Abu-Wandi said that King Abdallah truly recognizes that full diplomatic relations with Israel are in Jordan's best interest, but political realities require that he secure the release of the prisoners as part of the deal. Asked whether a prisoner release would be enough of a gesture, by itself, to allow the king to return the ambassador, Abu-Wandi said yes. Asked if any other issue equaled that of the prisoners, or could otherwise provide the cover for a return of the ambassador, Abu-Wandi said no. While a few other bilateral issues remain unresolved, none carries the same importance vis-a-vis the ambassador issue. Asked whether Jordan would extend an invitation for Shalom to visit absent a prisoner deal, Abu-Wandi said he did not know. The scenario, he acknowledged, would be for Israel to indicate privately that it is willing to release the prisoners, for Jordan to then invite Shalom to visit, and for the release to then be made public, followed by Jordan's expeditious return of its ambassador.

12. (C) COMMENT: While Abu-Wandi was paying his first call on pol/c, it was clear that he came for the sole purpose of raising the prisoner issue, frequently noting that Jordan hopes its "friends," including the United States, will make clear to the GOI the need for a prisoner release.

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KURTZER